British Waterways

Things To Look Out For On BW Property

Introduction

British Waterways has a diverse range of waterways & associated structures. Many of our waterways are over 200 years old but still retain their original design features and character. This information has been provided to assist you to prepare for a successful event by minimising risks to members of the public visiting your event and/or users and others who may be affected by the event. The information is not site specific or exhaustive, but should provide sufficient information to allow you to assess the general risks we are aware of. Where appropriate the information contained in this note will be supplemented with local knowledge of any hazards specific to the site where your event is due to take place.

Towpaths

Examples of conditions which may be experienced are:

- Irregular towpath widths
- Varying heights above water level
- Uneven surfaces / differing surface materials
- In many locations the towpath will have a natural surface, after periods of rain there may be standing water.
- There may be varying levels of grass and weed mowing (e.g. some towpaths may only be cut between July & October to allow bird nesting and growth of wild flowers)
- Differing types of vegetation including nettles & thistles, briers etc
- Towpaths may be bordered by hedges which may have thorns or sprays which grow out over the towpath
- Towpaths are also rich in wildlife. There may be wasp nests, wild bee's hives & wild animals. In some areas you may also be lucky enough to see snakes

Structures

Locks are interesting historic structures which still serve their original purpose. Be alert to:

- Unprotected drops onto land and / or into water
- Moving equipment such as lock gates & paddles
- Moving /turbulent water when the lock is operated
- Slip & trip hazards such as timber surfaces and mooring bollards

Swing & lift bridges are also doing the job they were originally designed for. Watch out for:

- Moving parts such as winches, swing arms lift arms and rotating barriers
- Care should also be taken when crossing bridges

General Hazards

- Take care if you need to drive stakes or metal pins into towpaths or other areas of BW land
- There may be underground & overhead services such as electricity, gas, water or communications equipment
- Our water may be susceptible to micro faecal & naturally occurring algal blooms
- In urban areas or areas close to hospitals there may be discarded needles & syringes in undergrowth or reed fringes
- Rivers & some canals can have changes in water levels especially during periods of heavy rain.

- At some locations there will be no safety equipment provided, at others the type of equipment may vary between lifebuoys, throw lines, ladders and grab chains. Please check what is available and consider what equipment you will need to provide for your event.
- At most locations the waters edge will be clearly visible at some it may be obscured by vegetation.

Other activities

Our waterways are used for many different activities, when planning your event please remember there could be other users such as:

- Boaters
- Anglers
- Cyclists
- Runners / joggers
- Walkers / ramblers
- Educational parties / other group visits

BW does not permit swimming in canals, motorcycling on towpaths or horse riding on non designated bridle paths. Please be alert however, that you may come across such irresponsible use of the waterways.

Some Do's & Don'ts

Do

- Observe signs and information provided by the local BW contact
- Visit the site prior to your event
- Establish the "on site" condition,
- Consider the time you will be visiting
- Consider changes which may be caused by the weather.
- Prepare your risk assessment, event plan & safety plan & keep it with you when you visit
- Brief others in your party/working at your event to ensure they know what to do in their normal duties and in an emergency
- Establish the location of the nearest hospital
- When visiting the waterside ensure you observe the water safety code, details are available on www.wow4water.net
- Consider other users
- Enjoy your visit / event

Do Not

- Obstruct towpaths with stalls, equipment or members of your party
- Allow member of your group/attendees at your event swim in our waters

Please contact us if you are unsure of any information contained in this guidance.

Peter Wade, BW Visitor Safety Advisor
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